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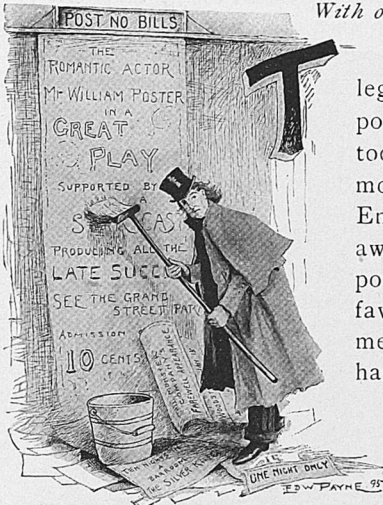
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BARNSTORMERS

By EDWARD PAYNE

With original illustrations by the author.



THE LEADING MAN

THE Knowall Dramatic Company was clearly on its last legs. We had been suffering from a severe attack of poor business for a month, and as the manager's face took on a sort of desperate expression the fact became more and more clear to us. The part of northern New England that leaves the White Mountains and stretches away toward the Atlantic, familiarly known as "the potato region," is rather uninviting under the most favorable circumstances; but to homesick, weary mummers, who each day come one step nearer dissolution, it has peculiarly unpleasant features.

It had become necessary to leave portions of our wardrobe at each hostelry we visited, and so the costume-plays had all been cut from our repertoire. The brass band had been reduced to four pieces, as several instruments had figured in forced sales; and the



VISIONS OF MANAGERIAL OFFERS

lirium-tremens scene. He was a good fellow, and we all felt worried about him.

The leading lady was growing very despondent. She had come from a quiet village, and she used to say that the faces of her dear old relatives haunted her more and more. She was a graduate of a school of acting, and had hoped for better things than these. The heavy man was also solo trombone in the band, and



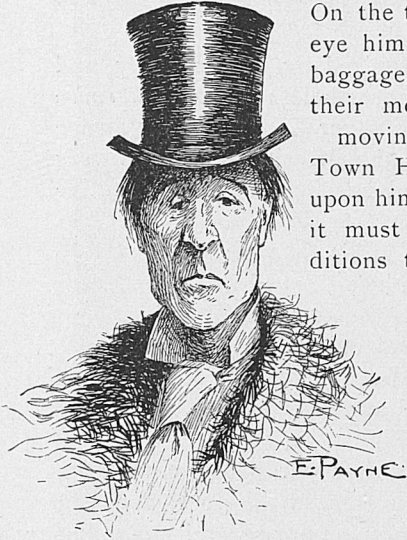
"THE LEADING LADY HAD COME FROM A QUIET VILLAGE"

played with renewed desperation each day,—in fact, he blew so much wrath into the instrument that the rest of us were completely drowned; but it was just as well, for we had lost interest in musical matters.

The trials of an actor who takes his art to the agricultural regions are practically unknown to the average theater-goer. To begin with, the Thespian is regarded with distrust in the provinces.

On the trains the conductors eye him keenly and weigh his baggage. The truckmen want their money in advance for moving his trunk to the Town Hall, the inn-keepers look upon him as a natural enemy, and it must be these unpleasant conditions that make him the picturesque character that he is.

He seldom, perhaps never, realizes his limitations, and produces "Jim the Penman" as cheerfully as "Uncle Tom's Cabin." His confidence in himself is beautiful to see, and he regards it as only a question of time when he shall make a hit and "walk



THE MANAGER

on velvet" for the remainder of his days. And yet with all his vanities he is generous to a fault, tender-hearted, ever ready to help an unfortunate of any description, and altogether a good fellow to meet.

The female portion of these traveling companies has nearly always been misrepresented. The soubrette is usually described as being the mother of the first old man, but she is frequently a very pretty little girl who lives among visions of managerial offers and sooner or later finds her way to a metropolitan engagement.

The soubrette in the Knowall Company was the soul of the whole party. Her merry smile was the balm of all our discouragements, and she was as much a favorite with this little band of wanderers as with her rural audiences.

There is something humorous about a small audience in a country theater. It



THE HEAVY MAN



THE SOUBRETTE AND HER RURAL ADMIRERS.



THE PROPRIETOR OF THE HOTEL AND HIS FAMILY IN THE FRONT ROW

usually consists of the proprietor of the hotel patronized by the company, and his family. They are always very appreciative, but nevertheless it is a hard house to play to. One night after we had presented "The Silver King" to an audience of the above description, Bilks came rushing into the dressing-room in a very excited frame of mind. Bilks was the "heavy," and he could be very effective when the occasion demanded.

"Do you know where Cameron is?" he shouted in his *Ingomar* voice. "I do not," said I. "Well I do, that is I mean I don't; but he's skipped and taken every red cent the company had, and we are lost,—lost in Aroostook County!"

It was sadly true. The manager had foreseen the end and had silently decamped. It's a way that managers have, and the indignation meeting that we organized on the spot is only one of hundreds that have been held in more or less remote and inhospitable parts of these United States.

We divided what little we had among the ladies, left our baggage with the irate landlord, who expressed a very different opinion of our last performance than his face in the front row had betokened, and departed upon our several ways; and in the gray twilight of that winter morning, as I looked on across the wastes of driving snow, I made a resolution.



"IN THE GRAY TWILIGHT I MADE A RESOLUTION"